
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, Feb. 4, 2013

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Lt. Governor Kleefisch, Secretary Newson Join Walgreens in Announcing Expansion of Job Training Initiative for People with Disabilities

Collaboration began with four Milwaukee stores last May, now expanding to Oconomowoc, Green Bay, Madison and other locations

OCONOMWOC – Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch and Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Reggie Newson joined Walgreens executives today in announcing the expansion of the national drugstore chain's innovative job training program for people with disabilities to select locations throughout the state.

On behalf of Governor Walker, Lt. Governor Kleefisch presented Steve Pemberton, Walgreens chief diversity officer, a commendation, thanking and congratulating Walgreens on the success of its **Retail Employees with Disabilities Initiative (REDI)** program. Wisconsin became one of the first states to team up with the drugstore chain as part of a national rollout last May, when four Milwaukee Walgreens locations worked with the state to offer REDI job training opportunities.

"Wisconsin today is a shining example of what can be achieved when we combine forces to provide job training opportunities to people with disabilities," Pemberton said. "We have seen firsthand the tremendous impact this has had on communities, families and our company. That is why Walgreens is pleased to announce the expansion of REDI in Wisconsin. We have REDI externs in training here today at our Oconomowoc store. More will receive training at stores in Madison, Green Bay and other communities."

In 2010, Walgreens launched REDI as a pilot in Texas and soon expanded it to more than 150 stores throughout Texas, New York and Connecticut. To date, more than 200 individuals across the country have successfully completed four weeks of training as service clerks, and 66 percent have been recommended for hire.

"With Walgreens and its remarkably successful REDI program, we see the wonderful benefits of working closely with businesses to create employment opportunities," Lt. Governor Kleefisch said. "Because of this collaboration, more people with disabilities are working today. More important than the jobs they hold is the independence they have gained. We are very pleased that Walgreens is expanding REDI, and we look forward to its continued success."

Following the REDI launch in Milwaukee last year, two more stores were added for a total of six. In all, 19 individuals successfully completed training, and 14 are now employed, 13 with Walgreens and one with another employer. The Milwaukee stores now have six more REDI interns in training.

"We truly appreciate having Walgreens as a strong, valuable partner in serving people with disabilities," Secretary Newson said. "The REDI program is having a tremendous impact on the lives of people with disabilities that we serve."

One of the 13 newly hired Walgreens employees is Elva Washington, who spoke enthusiastically about the program.

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“The program is life changing because of the opportunities it's given me to improve my life,” said Washington. “I've learned tools and skills that I will continue to use at work and in my personal life. I am grateful for the REDI program that allowed me this opportunity.”

Walgreens has more than 220 stores in Wisconsin, and the expansion of the REDI program to select locations throughout the state will occur gradually. With the announcement, the number of participating stores will double. In addition to the six stores in Milwaukee, REDI training will be offered at six more stores in Green Bay, Kaukauna, Madison, Oshkosh and the Oconomowoc store, site of Walgreens announcement. Each store has a capacity to train as many as three service clerks.

In Milwaukee the community organizations of Adonai Employment Service, Inc. and Goodwill Industries of Southeastern Wisconsin were recruited by DVR to facilitate the training with Walgreens. The REDI program is one way DVR investments are yielding successful outcomes for Wisconsinites.

DVR is the state's premier program to provide employment services and counseling to people with disabilities who face substantial barriers to employment. In 2012, DVR served 43,848 Wisconsin residents with disabilities and placed 3,250 people in jobs. These newly employed individuals are projected to earn \$56.4 million annually, representing a 210 percent return on the public investment in their services. DVR's budget is 78.7% federal funded with a 21.3% state match required for each federal dollar allotted to Wisconsin.

For more about the Walgreens REDI program: http://www.walgreens.com/topic/sr/disability_inclusion_home.jsp

For more about DVR: <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/>